1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

consequence of the death. If it be the hut of one of the subordinates, the roof is simply lifted off and thrown away into the bush.

Another very significant rite in connexion with the closing of the hut is accomplished on the death of the master of the village. A branch is cut from the tree of the village, the tree which was revealed by the divinatory bones as the one near which the headman had to build (See Part II Ch. II) ; half of the branch is placed across the great gate of the village, which is then closed and another gate opened, at some distance, in the fence ; the other half is put over the door of the crushed hut.

There seem to be great variations in the performance of these ceremonies everywhere. I believe, without being able to vouch for it, that when two family gatherings take place during this last period of the mourning, the first is held to proclaim the new master of the village and the second to distribute the inheritance amongst the heirs-at-law. At any rate these two important acts take place at the gatherings. As the inheritance consists mainly of live stock — human stock, the wives of the deceased, I shall describe the adjudication when treating of the fate of widows.

2) Family rites in the Northern clans.

A month after the burial, there is a first gathering of the grave-diggers. They are invited by the widows to a beer-feast. This beer is called : "the beer of the hyenas," as the hyenas also dig graves! No equivocal compliment is intended, the widows merely meaning to thank these men for their services.

In the northern clans, *yindlu a yi yili*, the hut is not taboo. It can be slept in again after the five days of the Great Mourning. The plaster of the doorposts is repaired, and a new crown is put on the top when the hut again finds an owner (1). The feast of the

(1) The hut of a leper alone is considered irremediably tabooed as the sufferer is buried in it. They dig a hole into which he is pushed by means of sticks. The roof is crushed down over him.

washed in the pool and which she will wear again for two days (1).

b) *The following days of the Great Mourning.* Without delay a new hut, a small provisional hut, is built in front of the mortuary one. Here the great wife will stay during the whole of her widowhood; the space between this and the old hut is more or less taboo and most of the possessions of the deceased are placed there, under the roof near the door on the outside. (See illustration p. 159.)

The other widows do not leave their huts, but they participate in the other purifying acts, the vapour baths and the general sprinkling of the fifth day. As regards the vapour baths, however, the first wife is associated with the grave-diggers, viz. she must be exposed to the strongest medicinal smoke, while the inferior wives are cleansed with weaker drugs. They all put on the *malopa* and eat with spoons during tne whole year of widowhood.

c) *Provisional decision regarding the fate of the widows.* A few days after the Great Mourning, a fresh gathering takes place, not in connection with the defilement of death, which is now provisionally cleansed, but *to settle provisionally the fate of the widows.* The sisters of the deceased have to play a special part in this gathering. They will lead the discussion with the widows about their new husbands. It is indeed a happy custom to let women decide on the subject. Not that they have unrestricted power in the matter. The law has provided a certain rule for the distribution and this is seldom departed from. However, some liberty is allowed in its application, and modifications can better be made if proposed by female intermediaries. Should the husband possess a harem (tshengwe), that is at least five wives, they will most likely be given to the following heirs. The great wife, being "the pole of the

(1) *Widowers* also form a similar society and undergo the same rites; but just as it was only the great wife who was subject to these laws, to the exclusion of the little wives, so it is only when he has lost his first wife that a man is initiated into the widowers' society. After having buried her (he holds her head) he goes to the pool, washes himself, and another widower comes and makes the incision in him in the inguinal region. Then he throws aways his *shifado* (Annotatio 1. 2) and also carries out the same crossing of the hut in tears. These three acts constitute the actual widower's mourning: the vapour baths and *fahla khombo* are part of his purification as being the principal grave-digger.

1[See category 11c --Analyst]

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787 village," must remain in it and belongs to the younger brother (1)
595 who becomes the master of the kraal. The second goes to the
428 second brother, the third to the third, the fourth to the *ntukulu*,
768 viz. to the son of the sister of the deceased. The fifth will then
604 become the wife of one of the sons of the deceased. This may appear shocking, and is really shocking even to the ideas of the Natives ; but let it be remembered that she is the youngest of all ; she was taken when the father was already old, and the first son is perhaps older than she. As regards the elder wives, the first and second especially, no one would think of keeping them
[835] for the son ! Incestuous relations are very rare amongst the Ba-Ronga. Even in this case, the feelings of both parties are more or less respected. The men advise the son to begin to play with the young widow, to ask her jocularly for tobacco, and he gradually accustoms himself to consider her no longer as a mother (mamana) but as a wife (nsati).

587 Of course the general rule is apt to be very much altered
595 according to circumstances. Should the deceased be the youngest
428 of the family, his elder brother may inherit the first wife. But
768 this is not the regular procedure.

The distribution having thus been decided on, the sisters of the deceased call the widows and say to them : "You so and so, you shall give food to so and so (phamela manyana)." But then the struggle begins. One of the widows, being old, may altogether refuse to have anything to do with any of her brothers-in-law. She may say : "I am taking my young son as a husband" which means : I do not want to be the wife of anybody. Or she will say : "I choose the big tree of the village where my late husband has built his hut." This answer may mean two things. Either : I do not leave this kraal and I will stay here without a husband ; or, on the contrary : I consent to be the wife of the man who becomes the headman of the village, viz. the eldest of the younger brothers. Another will say : "I love my *ntukulu* so and so." Should, however, the first wife desire to go to a man who does not

(1) Amongst the Ba-Ronga, an elder brother of the deceased cannot inherit a widow. It is taboo. He is a father to her, not a husband. He sometimes takes the lead in the discussion, having no personal interest in the matter. (See Part II).

587 393 428 768

live in the village, the family council will certainly object strongly to her wish, as her departure would mean that the village would cease to exist. But in the case of the younger widows it is quite possible that an exception to the ordinary law would be allowed if they insisted upon choosing another husband (1).

After all, this is but a preliminary consultation, and the men who are rejoicing at the idea of getting new wives will perhaps be badly deceived later on, as we shall see. However the man provisionally chosen as the future husband of a widow, will at once pay visits to her, "march to her" (ku mu fambela), according to the technical expression.

765 783 833

d) *The casting away of misfortune.* But before any new and happy life can begin for the widows, they have still to go through a very hard trial. They must perform the *lahla khombo*, the throwing away of the malediction of death, and this is much more difficult for them than for the grave-diggers or the other members of the village. The main point in this strange act of purification is this ; before a widow can become the wife of her new husband, she must have sexual intercourse with another man whom she deceives. Should she succeed in freeing herself from him so that the act keeps its ritual character, s. n. i. (see Annotatio 2), this man will take on himself the malediction of death, and she will be purified. On the contrary, should the man accomplish the whole act, the widow has failed and will return home with shame and in despair! Here is a description of this sad expedition of the widows. It takes place a few days after the gathering just described. The men of the village send the widows away, telling them : "Go and scatter (hangalasa) the malediction through the country and get rid of it before some other misfortune happens to us."

(1) What would happen should the widow choose a husband outside her husband's family? To the mind of a heathen woman the idea would never occur. But suppose a Christian widow, having only married suitors, refuses to become their wife, her conscience forbidding her to contract a polygamic union. Her case would be very hard indeed, as I do not think her wish would be taken into consideration by heathen relatives. It would have to be brought before the White magistrate, who would probably try to help the widow. I think that, even if the woman consented to submit such family matters to the European court, she would have to give the *lobolo* or her children back to her brothers-in-law, and that might be an impossibility for her. It would be interesting to know how Native Commissioners proceed in such cases.

1 [See p. 516 in these categories or in IBL -- Analyst]

587 Probably this widow was not pleased with the man to whom they
768 had destined her. Seeing more of him during the year, her affection had not increased. On the other hand, she had some liking for one of the *batukulu*, and she arranged secretly with him, and perhaps also with his mother, that she would keep silent till this day and then choose her nephew. It is quite possible that the mother of the *ntukulu* will say in that case: "Has this widow not been bought with the money which I secured for the family by my marriage?" Of course the official suitor objects strongly to this spoliation. He becomes angry. During a whole year he has given clothing to the ungrateful one. Things may grow so bad that the *ntukulu* carries off the fractious widow at once, saying: "Good-bye! I go with my wife!" The old men will then follow him and implore him to come back. If they see that the woman is quite decided, they will allow her to go to the husband of her choice. They had better consent to it at once, because it not infrequently happens that the *ntukulu*, if repulsed that day, will go to the family of the woman and claim the money *(lobola)* paid for her by her late husband, saying: "That *lobola* comes from my mother. If you do not give us our wife, if you allow her to stay with another man, then give us back the money." Or it may happen also that the widow, brought perforce to the house of a younger brother-in-law, will run away to the *ntukulu*, and the rightful husband will be helpless. There is a saying to this effect: "A woman inherited cannot be forced." Of course
587 such cases of conflicting interests cause a great deal of friction
578 between members of the family, and the Natives are much distress-
768 ed about it; they try to avoid it as much as possible. But the
428 desire of getting one more wife is so strong in the heart of a Ronga that such disputes are by no means rare, and the day of the adjudication of the inheritance is universally dreaded. However, they never go as far as fighting, and if an uncle and a nephew have parted from each other on bad terms, they will very likely try to mend matters by the sacrifice of reconciliation *(hahlelana madjieta)*, which is one of the admirable features of the Ronga religion (See Part VI).

The widows are truly the most important part of the property

768 left by a man. When they have been distributed, the minor
428 possessions of the deceased are adjudicated. As regards *oxen*,
604 *money*, these have been already remitted to the younger brother or, in his absence, to the sons. The younger brother will use them as family property to buy a wife for his son or for the son of the deceased, when he comes of age. In the distribution of the implements which have been cleansed, but left lying on the ground in front of the hut up to this day, the *ntukulu*, viz. the principal uterine nephew again plays an important part. He has the right of *tjhumba*, viz. of picking out for himself one of the assagais of his uncle, just as the maternal uncle takes (tjhumba) one pound from the lobola money (See Part II). Every warrior possesses at least two assagais ; the big one belongs in principle to the chief, and must be inherited by the eldest son. The nephew takes the smaller one, but he must precede his cousin in choosing ; in appropriating this weapon, he *surrenders* or transmits (nyiketa) the inheritance to the true heirs. This is a very characteristic expression. It seems as if he wished to assert his right ; but he takes the less valuable weapon and leaves the better one to the son. The explanation of this custom is probably to be found in the evolution of the family system which must have taken place amongst the Thongas (See Part II). In fact all the *batukulu* stand in a line and receive a portion of the property of the deceased, a knife, an axe, a small punch, etc. Women never inherit (a ba di
562 pfindla). When no heir exists except females, they may receive
428 something, but the valuable property must be kept by them for their sons, the uterine nephews of the deceased. Why ? Because, in the mind of the Thongas, a woman is not capable of possessing ; she is not able to build an oxen kraal and repair it ; how could she possess oxen ? The only thing she can do is to arrange a pig's kraal. Therefore she can own pigs, but nothing else!

768 The end of the feast of the adjudication of the inheritance is the distribution of the flesh of the victims. The company breaks up, each party having received one of the limbs. They must eat it on their way home, somewhere under a tree, on the road ; neither in the mortuary village, nor in their own kraal. It is

601 reciprocal, means brothers as well as sisters. If he wishes to specify, he adds to makwabu : "of the assagai," or "of the basket." It is never employed except when united with the possessive pronoun : *makweru* means my brother, *makwenu* your brother, *makwabu*, his brother or sister. The elder brother is called *nhondjwa* (plur. tinhondjwa). The nhondjwa is also called *hosi* (plur. tihosi) chief. The hierarchy of age is very strictly observed amongst the Thongas. The elder brother is treated with great respect and gives orders to his younger brothers with almost the same authority as the father. It must be noticed also that the position of elder brother is not only a matter of age, but, in the polygamic family, all the children of a first wife, or of the first house, are *tihosi* to the children of secondary or posterior wives or houses, though they may have been born after them. They take precedence of them. Amongst girls, an elder sister is often called *mamana*, mother, whilst an elder brother is never a tatana (father) but a hosi (chief).

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601 The term *makwabu* is applied to all my first and second cousins who have the same paternal grandfather, or great-grandfather, as I have. Cousins on my mother's side are also bamakwabu, some of them at least, those who are my maternal aunt's children. But cousins on the father's side are more fully bamakwabu than those on the mother's side : Muhambi is more so to Hlangabeza than to Mahlobo, because the two former belong to the same shibongo, family name ; they are men of the Makaneta clan and Muhambi could therefore inherit Hlangabeza's wives ; Muhambi and Mahlobo are not of the same clan, and could not inherit from each other. From this fact we begin to see that the laws of inheritance, and especially the laws of the distribution of the widows amongst the family which has bought them, are closely connected with the system of relationship.

601 604 605

601 The man who has married my wife's sister is also a makwabu to me, a nhondjwa if he has married her elder sister (Phayindi to Mboza), a ndjisana if the younger (Magwazizen to Mboza). The brothers of Phayindi and Magwazizen are also called brothers by Mboza.

There is a special term in the Northern clans to indicate the

assagay. The batukulu dispose of the portion of the limbs offered to the gods. They *cut* the prayer and, at that moment they steal the meat or the beer of the sacrifice and run away with them. Why is this? "Because a ntukulu does not fear the saliva of his malume" (Mboza). They live in such intimacy with them that they can eat that which was reserved for the gods (1) (See p. 162).

The ntukulu *also takes precedence* in some other rites ; in the circumcision school the uterine nephew of the chief is at the head of the circumcised. In the *luma milomo* (page 146) he starts the purifying ceremony, and "gives to the others" (nyiketa) the use of the food of the deceased.

But it is especially in the question of the inheritance that he shows himself in his characteristic aspect. Father-right has set in and is strongly supported by the lobola custom. Therefore the sons of the deceased have the sole right to the property of their father, wives as well as implements. The batukulu, however, the uterine nephews, refuse to be left out! You will find them everywhere, trying to get something for themselves. They were already planning with the malume's wives to take them as spouses after the death of their husband. Remember how they teased the whole family, on the day of the distribution of the widows (page 208). When the implements were distributed, they came and claimed their *tjhumba* (a technical expression, it would seem, which means precisely this kind of claim lodged by a malume or a ntukulu). They were given the small assagay, the big one remaining for the son. In this way *ba nyiketa pfindla, they give over the inheritance to the legal heirs.* This is a most vivid representation of a right which no longer exists, having in fact become

(1) Some ethnographers have supposed that ancestral worship only began when the father took command of the family and consequently did not exist in the period of mother-right. This seems to me absolutely false. The spirits of the mother's family are invoked as well as the father's ancestors, and the special place of the uterine nephews in worship down to this day is best explained in this way: before the gods of the father were known and prayed to, those of the mother were worshipped, and consequently the batukulu held a special position in the ritual. When the ancestors on the father's side made their appearance in the Bantu Pantheon, beside those on the mother's side, or after the institution of father right, the batukulu preserved that special position.

604 obsolete, but which asserts itself in virtue of the survival of an old
178 custom. I have often been struck by the unconscious way in
428 which they act on all these occasions! They give the impression of people who have been hypnotised and ordered to do something next day, when no longer in the mesmeric sleep. You see them carrying out the act, constrained by a mysterious necessity and without knowing why they do so. The hypnotising factor here is the weight of heredity, of all this hoary antiquity, which belongs indeed to the past, but still influences the subliminal life of the tribe...

643 As regards the chiefs, I may add that the uterine nephew may
604 be given the chieftainship over a certain part of the country. He is well received at the Court, better than the nephews on the brother's side, because, with these, there is always the risk that they may become usurpers. This also explains why a chief, when in danger, will ask help from his bakokwana rather than from the relatives of his own family. The latter may seize the opportunity for "bangana buhosi", i. e. to dispute the chieftainship with him.

611 Mother-right most probably existed amongst the ancestors of
178 the Thongas, whatever may be the country in which they then lived
602 and the name by which they were called. But everything seems to prove that this phase has long ago passed away. No one remembers anything of the kind. Genealogies, which are the oldest records of the tribe, mention only the ancestors of the father. They are recalled much better than those of the mother. The lobola custom, which is the strongest support of the paternal right at the present time, has been practised since time immemorial (1). See also the special names of the great-grandfathers in the paternal line (p. 227).

000 (1) Lobola is however not incompatible with the uterine form of the family. I have been informed by the Rev. E. Allégret, working in the French Congo, that the Mpongwe and Galoa of the Lower Ogowe have still partly preserved the mother-right. But lobola exists. The first lobolo is payed indifferently to the father or the mother of the bride, and the choice is made according to the personal relations existing between the husband's family and the families of the bride's parents. When a second daughter marries, half the lobolo is given to the maternal uncle. The children stay in the father's village, but they are under the guidance of the mother and of her family. They belong to the mother's clan. This system evidently denotés a less advanced stage of evolution. However matriarchy is passing into patriarchy, and the lobola custom will probably hasten the process.

423 643 By law the soil belongs to the Chief, but only that, through him, it may become general property. No one can buy land. It is gratuitously assigned to any and all who wish to settle in the country. The mere fact of *kondza*, viz., making submission to the chief (Vol. I, p. 433), entitles the Native to as much land as may be necessary for his subsistence.

423 622 It will be readily understood, however, that the supreme Chief, however small his territory may be, can hardly assume the duty of marking out the various small allotments for his subjects. In ordinary practice this is done by the headmen of the villages (numzane), the important men of the country, (I will call them A), who obtain the grant of considerable tracts of land, which they apportion amongst those under their jurisdiction. They and their near relatives cultivate the most fertile parts of these tracts, or districts, and when any one (say B) wishes to settle on their reserve, they "cut the bush" for him, "tjemela nhoba," to use the technical expression ; they accompany the would-be-settler to an uncultivated piece of land and together they fix the boundaries of a plot of ground which is then assigned to him. A tree, the corner of a lake, a well, or an anthill, may be used as landmarks in this primitive surveying operation. The new-comer will clear as much of the land as he can, till it, and the fields, together with the trees they contain, will become thenceforth his property. Should any of his relatives wish to settle near him, he will, in his turn, assign to them a portion of his land, which they may clear and cultivate ; and so the distribution continues. Supposing B is not satisfied with his allotment, or is unable to live on neighbourly terms with A, and builds his hut in some other spot, he cannot sell or otherwise dispose of his land, as it must revert to A, the original owner. On the other hand, should B die, his wife would inherit his gardens. Should father or mother die, the property would naturally pass to the sons, who would divide the fields between their wives. Thus we see that real estate is hereditary, but cannot be sold. A similar state of affairs would result should A, the numzane, who ranks almost as a petty chief, leave the country : all his rights in connection with the tract that he may have occupied for the last fifty years will cease with his departure.

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